SYLVESTER ROUBIDEAUX, Sioux

June 17, 1975

St. Charles, Missouri

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

LISTENING TO INDIANS

NO. 12

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Glen Rock, New Jersey
Microfilming Corporation of America
1978
Sam Myers:

Sylvester Roubideaux and I are sitting here on the bank of the Missouri River down in the waterfront area of St. Charles. There's a nice park here where we can see the river flow by, and it's kind of an appropriate place after all, because Sy comes from South Dakota where the Missouri is the big river flowing right through the state. Sy, in our first conversation you were speaking of your land.

Sylvester Roubideaux:

I just recently received a letter from my lessers. They want to buy my land. If I was back on the reservation; if I didn't have no income, I would probably would have sold it just like any other Indian back on reservation. But here I have my own shop, I have my store; I have my income comin' in, so I just tell 'em, "Hell with you. Why should I sell my land to you? I want to keep it because the value of the land is going up, and when I needed the money, you wouldn't give me enough money because I needed it." But now, sure I need the money, but I have an income comin' in; I pay my taxes, and that land is there so my children can keep it. So right now my youngest daughter is only six weeks old, and she will inherit this land, and my oldest daughter will inherit this land, and God forbid, I hope they never sell it.

SM: Sy, your land is in South Dakota, but you're living here in St. Charles; you have the shop, The Indian Den, in St. Charles. What is the address over there?

SR: 329 South Main.

SM: Somebody asked me for it the other day. And are you still participating in rodeos?

SR: Yes, I am. I'll be ridin' the 20th of this month at Hillsboro.
SM: Do you ride broncos or bulls?

SR: I'll be ridin' a saddle bronc. And from there I'll go to a place called Nevada, Missouri, an Indian powwow.

SM: Is that over on the west side of Missouri?

SR: I think it's south of Springfield. And I'll be dancin' down there.

SM: Are you going to do the Hoop Dance there?

SR: Yes, I'll do the Hoop Dance, and I'll go for the contest.

SM: By the way, I saw some photographs of you somebody had taken doing the Hoop Dance, and your wife was telling me about the championships you'd won. They're nice pictures.

SR: Thank you. I have taken two of the largest trophies that they can ever award, which is International which come from Canada, and the National, which comes from here in America, United States. I have more trophies.

SM: Were you dancing the Hoop Dance or other dances?

SR: No, this is what they call strictly a Fancy War Dance. See, a long time ago the different tribes . . . O.K., like the Crow, the Arapaho, Cheyennes . . . 'course they were our allies . . . the Crows, Pawnees, we used to fight them, but now we go up there and we dance against them as a competition.

SM: That's better than shooting, isn't it?

SR: Sure, it's a lot better than bullets. Sometimes they come to our
reservation, and they dance against us. So, this national trophy that I won was what you call a travelling trophy. It went from Oklahoma to New Mexico, Arizona, Idaho, but you have to win it twice, each year—two years running—to keep it. It's a travelling trophy. It's almost four feet tall. So when it came to South Dakota, I dance against it in all the dances from all the tribes came there, and we compete against it. I won it; it remained there. And next year I danced again, and I defeated them again, so the trophy was mine.

SM: So you got to keep it. Where is it now?

SR: It's back home in a museum back home, in the museum right there in Rosebud.

SM: Does it have your name on it?

SR: It has my name on it.

SM: Maybe I can get a picture of that and I can add it to our story here and our set of slides. That's quite a thing. You know, a lot of people don't realize that you have this organized competition in between the tribes—dancing all over the country.

SR: Just like rodeo. We have what they call Indian Activities Association. We pay a dollar to be in that association, and then we compete—all the tribes in the United States—we compete against each other, and you get points. You get dollar a point—one contest might be $500. Or you might take second place which might be $300, might take third place which is $200. Or you might take day money, or you might take a runner-up, which runs about $50. But after the end of the year they add all these points up, and the top ten, just like in the rodeo, the top ten money winners... they go for the national finals. And then, it is up to the Indian Activities, which consists
of ten different tribes members—they pick a place where you go for
the national finals. That might be Fort Yates, North Dakota—the
last one was right outside Helena, Montana, it was Crow Agency, Mon-
tana.

SM: Near Helena?

SR: Yeah. No, Hardin, Montana. It's called the Crow Agency; or it might
be picked in South Dakota some place. Or it could be in Oklahoma, it
could be in New Mexico. It's where they decide where they want to put
it. So then we all go down there, we go to the national championship,
and you have what they call an elimination. It's for three days.
Every day they knock off two, three, until four dancers are left—
just four. And they go into the contest. That means they have a
first place, second place, third place, and then you have a runner-up.
So the judges are right there, and every day they change a different
driver. They change 'em because of favoritism.

SM: To make it fair?

SR: Yeah. To make it fair they do that. And then they pick out the
winner. So that is how I won my trophies.

SM: That's quite an accomplishment then. You see, it's a lot more than
we realized, because we didn't know what a broad territory this covers,
and all the competitors from all the tribes are in there.

SR: O.K. All right. Like now, my baby's only six weeks old, but I live
with her, and I sing to her. And my dad done the same thing to me
before he got killed over to Italy. He sing to me from what I under-
stand, so that is why I learn the rythm when I grew up. I learn the
rythm with the drum.
SM: It's part of you?

SR: I just grew up with it. And then, when I was old enough . . . the first contest I ever won was a pair of Levis and a shirt, which was during World War II. It was a big contest, and this trader, he lived on the reservation, he grew up there on reservation. Well, he donated this pair of pants and the shirt to see who wins the contest, and I think I was . . . I just barely remember that . . . I was about six or seven.

SM: That was a big day, wasn't it?

SR: Well, that moccasin I got up at the store--little moccasin--that's when I was wearin' that. Then from there I kept hittin' contests, and besides that I was tryin' to learn to ride rodeos.

SM: So you've got the land in Dakota, you've got the dancing contests, you've got the rodeos--you ride Brahma bulls in the rodeos--and, you've got the store here.

SR: Yes. Well, actually, I'm not ridin' Brahmas anymore, because I'm too old for it now. I'll be going to Hillsboro, but I'll be ridin' saddle broncs because Brahmas are just too much for me, because it's just like any other sport. You get too old for one.

SM: You've got to taper off some time. Besides you've got a lot of other responsibilities, haven't you?

SR: Yes, I have. Can't afford to get hurt too much. I don't believe I mentioned this before. See, my mother remarried after my dad got killed in World War II, and she got the $10,000 insurance from my dad. So with that we bought the horses, we bought cattle. . . .
SM: Did you get some land too then?

SR: No. We had the land...it doesn't go to my stepfather anyway—it goes to us, the children—there's my three sisters and myself, it goes to them. So that's the land that I have right now. And my sisters, they sold their land already—their part of the land they sold, but I still got mine. I sold 160 acres one year. So out of that we had all the horses, the cattle that we wanted, and that is where I got into the cattle and horses.

SM: You grew up with them?

SR: Yes. People see me on the street here, and they say, "How come an Indian is wearin' a cowboy hat and cowboy boots?" But these people have never been west, and up there you find a lot of Indian cowboys. In fact, Casey Tibbs, which is a half-breed, he was a national championship...he was a national champion cowboy rodeo, all around.

SM: We were going to discuss your costume. Are you ready to describe it? We took pictures of you in full view, and then we took all the different pieces you were wearing, and I'd like to have you describe each, because most of us don't know exactly what they are, and what they mean.

SR: O.K. Well, I'll start from the head, first. O.K. I wear the feather on my head, and the deer tail back there is...actually, that is meant for a single man, a person that's available.

SM: Available for a wife?

SR: Yeah. For a wife. I wear that for quite a few years before I met my wife, Diane. But I still wear it because she says, "It's Indian, you wear it, because you had it for so many years." Now the deer,
to the Indian means . . . O.K., that's a buck, a big buck. And a buck never goes out and looks for women. The female deer come to him, and that is why the Indian always says . . . O.K., in Indian word is called ya-ha-ka, which means, you might say . . . well, he's a lover. The women always come to him. That is why we wear it. The reason for this is because . . . like in any sport, you have good dancer, you have good rodeo rider, and naturally the women are gonna come to try to talk to you. So that is why I wear that, which I don't really need it now, because I'm married. But that's the symbol of it, and I just wear it 'cause I had it so long.

SM: Yes. It's interesting to know what it meant.

SR: Now that is my hair ties. The porcupine quills that I wear on the side represent the Sioux Nation, or the Northern Plains Indians, because if I go down south I wear that, they know automatically where I come from, and my braid on one side that I wear where I tie it, or sometimes I don't even have to wear that, I just have one braid on the left-hand side and they know. Or, I can braid it right straight in the back. O.K. Every tribe has different braids which represent their tribe.

SM: Most of them know the others?

SR: Yeah, and they see you, they know what tribe you're from, automatically. O.K., my choker is made out of elk bone. It's of elk bull.

SM: Those are the white tube-like pieces?

SR: Yes, the ones on my choker, the ones you see there. And the ones right below it, is an extension to my choker. I only wear that for ceremonial purposes. It looks like one piece, but it is not one piece. In the picture it looks like it's one piece, but it is actually two pieces, and that is made out of deer bone, and if you
notice, my choker bones are longer than the extension. It's shorter. The shorter ones came from a deer, and the longer ones come from an elk. And that's a backbone--the whole backbone, the vertebrae. O.K., it's honed down until you make a perfect round.

SM: That must be quite a lot of work.

SR: Yes it is. And the hole is already there, because the hole is where the spinal fluid goes through. That is why the holes are naturally there. Now you come further down, the breastplate. O.K., the breastplate--the one I have on--it's composition. It's made out of bone and plastic mixed together. I'm sorry I didn't have my wife here with her breastplate. The women wears a longer, elaborated more, because she works it down to her knees. But what she has is real buffalo bone, and it weighs quite a bit.

SM: It must be quite valuable.

SR: It is. It is a museum piece, but she won't part with it, no way, because it is a museum piece. So if I wear a real buffalo bone breastplate, it would be so heavy that I wouldn't be able to do the dances that I have to.

SM: Do you wear the breastplate when you do the dances too--your own breastplate?

SR? No. My real breastplate, I use it for, you know, pictures.

SM: And ceremonial things, but not when you're dancing.

SR: When I'm dancing I wear the composition because it's a lot lighter. O.K. The beadwork on my belt, on my cuffs that you see there, my arm bands. Every Indian has his own color, but we usually inherit
our colors. Green, red and yellow was Red Shirt's color, which is
my great grandfather who I'm named after. These are his colors.
O.K., red stands for bein' Indian, and green stands for that he will
survive every year, and come out when everything is . . . in the
spring. And the yellow stands for no cowardice. See, always wear a
color. Always wear yellow . . . see your yellow war paint, see you
look for this, that means that you're no coward. So these three
colors that he had, I use 'em now. These are my colors.

SM: You've got them in that choker you're wearing right now.

SR: Yes. So, O.K., now the arm bands. The mountain designs show that
the Black Hills of South Dakota is our land.

SM: So you have colors and design both.

SR: Yeah. The sharp point means they're mountains, mountain designs.
That means they're the Black Hills, which is mine. My people.

SM: Yes. They're your home.

SR: That belongs to my people. So every Indian has different colors,
different designs. You will find no Indian wearing the same design
or wearing the same colors. But the red is always worn by Indian.

SM: They all wear red?

SR: Yes. Because that shows that he come from Mother Earth. It's clay
he come from. Always red, always wear red. And sometimes you find
black. That means that he lost somebody that he really loved--like
his mother, maybe his wife, maybe his daughter, his son. That means
that he lost somebody that he really cherished--the only time that he
wears the black, like a black feather hanging with his feathers.
SM: Black on his face maybe?

SR: Um hm, might wear war paint made out of black. But these are the things that they wear when we dance. O.K. The breech cloth under my belt, O.K., you notice I have the sunburst on that. Now the sunburst is more modern. That means I accept this age . . . this generation . . . my own generation now, the sunburst. It has no meaning whatsoever.

SM: Other than that.

SR: No . . . it just means that I accept this generation, I'm with this generation. All right, as you come down . . . because, nowadays the breech cloth that we wear . . . you notice in the pictures I wear shorts? A long time ago there wasn't no shorts, so we had to wrap it around and with a tie string it is worn that way.

SM: A very practical garment really, except now it's mostly ceremonial.

SR: Yes, it's more ceremonial now, so we just have the top and the back and we just tie it down.

SM: And it's decorated.

SR: Yes, and we wear swimming trunks. Then the leggings are made of felt. Now mostly the leggings that you find authentic is made out of buckskin. I am not that much of a war chief where I can actually wear the beaded buckskin leggings.

SM: Oh, you're not supposed to unless you're a war chief?

SR: Unless you're a war chief, unless you have committed something . . . O.K. I was in Korea. I fought in Korea, now I can wear 'em.
SM: Because of that?

SR: Yeah, I can wear 'em because of that. But it costs so much money to make it.

SM: Aren't they awfully warm too when you're dancing?

SR: Yeah, then they're hot. No, I don't dance with 'em. See, when I dance I take my leggin's off, then I put my ... what they call angora, it's a goat, long hair, that you wear from your thigh all the way down, and then you wear bells on it. Now, to be a war dancer ... nobody becomes a dancer ... I mean only in his own dance. Just a very few chosen ones that grew up with it know the rhythm—the same way with the singers. You know, people think that they all go out there and just say, "aia-aia" but they don't. These singers have a special song. They know how to do the chant. They have to pick up this chant because, like I said, I competed against all the tribes. It has to be a chant where all other tribes know it. But we do have our special war dance song. I have a special song that I went to Korea and I fought and I came back, and that is a special song that they'll sing for me, with my Indian name in it, which is a honoring song, and, when they sing it, my mother, my father, my sisters, my first cousins, second cousins, they all get out there, and they'll donate either money or some goods to someone in that crowd for a memento of singing honor song for me.

SM: That's kind of expensive for them, isn't it?

SR: Well, they can give two dollars away, they can give a dollar away, or whatever they want. Or they might ask somebody to come over to their house and eat; but it's in my honor that they do. We never accept, we give.
SM: It's an idea, a gesture, isn't it?

SR: But once you give these away you can never return. I'd like to inject right here . . . the "Indian giver." The "Indian giver" is actually a white man's version of the white man takin' back, because once we give we never take back.

SM: A lot of people don't understand that.

SR: Yes. You never take anythin' back, no matter how these people are, what you give up you can never take back. If you do, everybody, the whole Nation, will put you down . . . he's not worthy of his name, he's not worthy of his gift.

SM: You can accept a gift from someone else, though, can't you?

SR: Oh yeah, sure, definitely we can. So, the French man did give . . . like they take somethin', give it to you, the next day, they get the Indian drunk—they give 'im whiskey, he gets drunk—and the next day they come back and say, "Look, you took my rifle, you took my axe," and then they take it back. But that is "Indian giver" . . . actually it was a Frenchman that started that word. But there was no such thing as "Indian giver" in any tribe in United States.

SM: Sy, you were holding a pipe at one point—you were carrying it—and you were also wearing moccasins. Is there anything that you'd like to explain about them?

SR: Yes. O.K., that pipe, it's a peace pipe, and my dad gave that to us for our marriage. Diane and I got married, we used that pipe.

SM: You carry it? Do you smoke it too?
SR: No, no, we don't smoke it. Like this man I was tellin' you about. He's a full-blooded Iroquois. O.K., he is capable enough to wear a war bonnet, so he wear the war bonnet, carry the pipe, sit in front of the preacher, in front of our star quilt, and we got married with that pipe. And that pipe was blessed at the time we got married. Now when I go back for the Sun Dance, this coming July, the 4th of July, I'll carry that pipe, and I'll use that pipe in our Sun Dance, because it is what they call a virgin pipe--it's never been smoked yet.

SM: Now you're going back for the 4th of July for the Sun Dance?

SR: The 3rd of July. Yes, I'll be goin' for the Sun Dance. I'll pierce, I want to pierce. I've never done it before.

SM: This is going to be the first time.

SR: The first time, and ... I'm afraid of it.

SM: Is it painful?

SR: It is, it's painful.

SM: Do you have some kind of sedative or pain killer there that you can use?

SR: No, you can't use that.

SM: You're not supposed to?

SR: No. O.K., I shall be there three days ahead of time, so I'll know exactly what to do, and where my place is at, because the medicine man is there; he's the one that shows me exactly what to do. I leave the
30th of this month and Diane will be there--she'll get there on the 2nd, in time for the Sun Dance, you know, and it'll take me at least four days to heal, then I'll come back. But I'm doin' it for a purpose, and I cannot tell you my purpose. I cannot tell anyone why I'm doin' it. Because that is our religion.

SM: It's a motivation, religiously inspired, would you say?

SR: Well . . . it's somethin' that I cannot tell you . . . that I want to go through for that reason.

SM: A lot of people think the Sun Dance isn't done any more.

SR: It is. Every year it is done. Sometimes it's done five times a year.

SM: That's the high point of the religious year for the people?

SR: Yes. June, July and August, three months.

SM: We thought that it had been discontinued, but now you're going to do it yourself.

SR: Well, it was. Back in the early 1900's it was outlawed, because they thought that might inspire another uprisin', like Wounded Knee. So it was cut off, and then all the tribes of the Sioux Nation, they all got together, and they fought back. 0.K., in 1934 they came out with these laws that we were actually citizens. They made us citizens. So then they went back and they said, "0.K., if we're citizens you are denyin' us our rights, constitutional rights, our freedom of religion." So the government had to come back and allow us to do it.

SM: So it's not illegal any more?
SR: No, we can go through with it.

SM: It's still pretty private, isn't it? It isn't done for tourists and that sort of thing?

SR: No.

SM: It's a serious ceremony?

SR: Yeah. See, on the reservation, the most two kinds of religion there is, Catholic and Episcopalian. Well, all the time we go through the Sun Dance, you always find a Catholic priest and an Episcopalian priest outside where we're dancin', prayin'. That night we're fastin', and all night long they sit out there and they just sit there and pray. Next morning we come out for the Sun Dance, they be right out there and they be prayin' with us, but they cannot come inside where we're prayin' . . . where we're doin' the Sun Dance. But they'll be on the outside prayin' with us.

SM: So inside--this is in the Sun Dance lodge? Men, women and children?

SR: Yes, all Indians can go in.

SM: It's a time when people come together hoping for better health . . . and prayers for family and friends?

SR: They know what we're goin' through, so they come out there, and they pray . . . they help you pray. They're prayin' for you too while you're dancin' out there.

SM: Now you keep your eyes at the top of the pole on the Sun Dance medicine bundle, don't you?
SR: No, at the sun.

SM: At the sun itself? Is that hard on your eyes?

SR: No, not really, because you can look right straight up at it, but you don't look directly into the sun. No, you look at it, but you're almost facin'... your face has to be towards the sun where the rays of the sun comes into your face. So you don't look right directly at the sun.

SM: That would be hard on your eyes.

SR: Yeah, it would. But we'll be facin' the sun, and yet the sunlight, the rays of it, goes into our body, and that is the Spirit that we're prayin' to, because that is our Great Spirit. We're not worshipin' the sun, but the Great Spirit put the sun there, and His rays is the Great Spirit.

SM: And they warm the earth?

SR: Yes. Everything that He brings--He brings green grass, He brings fruit--He makes the rivers flow. So that is why we pray to Him in that way. And then, what I'm goin' through... I ask Him when I'm prayin'--"I ask Your forgiveness for what I'm doin', for how bad I've been." But I just plain tell Him, "Forgive me for all this, and accept what I'm tryin' to ask you." But no sun dancer... guys that's goin' through the Sun Dance... never prays for himself personally. It has to be for somethin' else or some other people, somethin' else... for his people or somethin'. But he has one objective, I mean, one reason for goin' through the Sun Dance... one main reason... and I don't tell that to no one except my medicine man, because I want to go through it because of this. And
he'll pray for me before I go through it, and he goes through more with the prayer than I would actually go through, because he is prayin' for me, and he helps me go through it, see?

SM: Did you say it takes about three days to get ready, all the preparations for it?

SR: Yes, three days.

SM: And then the actual Sun Dance itself, that's one day, isn't it?

SR: Yes, one day.

SM: And then you either continue until you collapse, or until the sun goes down or until you tear loose?

SR: Tear your flesh.

SM: But if you don't tear loose when the sun goes down then it's over, isn't it?

SR: No. They'll untie you, you go back in the lodge, next mornin' you go through it again. There are times when men had to go through four times, four days, before they actually tear loose.

SM: And you're kind of apprehensive about this, but you want to do it?

SR: I have to do it.

SM: And you're going to do it this year?

SR: This year, the 3rd of July.
SM: When it's over would you want to talk about it?

SR: No, I cannot talk about it. It's against my religion.

SM: That's understandable, and we should all respect the other person's views on that sort of thing. And you're going back out in August too, aren't you?

SR: Yes. The last part of August is our Travel Fair.

SM: That'll be a happier, light-hearted occasion, not the seriousness of the Sun Dance. You're just going out to have fun with the people.

SR: Yes. Be with the people, greet people, meet your old friends. That's what a powwow is for. They come from all different reservations and, like the old people, they like to see if they're still alive. They shake hands and say, "I'm glad to see that you're still here this year." And the younger generation, they have... .

SM: Are the old people accorded great respect among the Indian people?

SR: Oh, yes. Quite a bit, yeah.

SM: In other words they're not shoved aside?

SR: No. That's what it is really, for the really old people. You know, a long time ago--they don't do it hardly no more--they had this long grass--it's called a sweet grass--O.K., it's called the Grass Dance. Every spring, first part of the spring, there was a great big powwow, and old people--O.K., I'm talkin' about old people is 60, 70, 80 years old--they go down along the river banks, and they cut this grass and then they put it right behind their backs, right on their flanks, and they dance. They have special song for 'em. So they
dance to show that they have survived another year, and the grass shows that they have come through another year, and hopefully they'll be back again next year to dance, so they won't pass away for that year. It's called a Grass Dance. It's a very special dance that people know they came through ... and people have respect for 'em.

SM: So that in a way the powwow is kind of a recognition, a celebration even of all this?

SR: Yes.

SM: Everybody having made it another time, and getting together to enjoy each other's company?

SR: Yes. That's where a lot of this integration comes in between different tribes, I mean different reservations.

SM: There's a lot more of that now than there used to be, isn't there?

SR: Oh yes, quite a bit. Every week-end they come down. Now you might find some people comin' from Pine Ridge or from Standin' Rock Reservation, like from Montana, or from Sac and Fox in Tama, Iowa. They might come up there. Or a guy might come up, meet a Sioux girl, and, you know, they fall in love and they get married; or a Pawnee--there's a lot of inter-marriage goin' on on the powwow. That is the purpose of it--tryin' to expand the Indian Nation.

SM: Well, actually the Indian nation is growing too, isn't it?

SR: Yes it is, quite a bit.

SM: There are more than a million now, aren't there?
SR: Oh, there's quite a bit more than that.

SM: The last census figures were just under that, but then, of course, they always miss a bunch of people, don't they?

SR: Oh yes, because they have quite a few comin' from Canada.

SM: Sy, when do you plan to do the Hoop Dance again?

SR: That'll be August, I think it's the 16th, 17th, 18th, during the Festival of Little Hills here in St. Charles. See, that's when they close up here, and they close up the First Capital Drive, and the whole street is wide open.

SM: They close it to automobiles, and people walk up and down?

SR: Yes. It's all walk.

SM: And you're going to do the Hoop Dance then? Where will it be, in front of the store?

SR: No, right in front of the first American Indian store. We have a big tepee there.

SM: The first American Indian store? There's an open lot there, isn't there?

SR: Yes. That's where it was at last year. Then I'm hopin' to bring down ten full-blood Indians from South Dakota.

SM: To participate in the dancing?

SR: Yes, you know, for the show.
SM: When is this going to be so we can fix the date in our minds?

SR: I think it's August either 16, 17, 18 or it's 17, 18, 19. It's on the weekend, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but it's in August.

SM: A little past the middle of August, in St. Charles.

SR: Yes. Right in St. Charles. And I'll be performin' out there, and I'll bring my niece down. She was runner-up for Miss Indian America.

SM: Miss Indian America this last year?

SR: No, that was about four years ago. She's in college now. She was a probation officer, but she's in law school now, she's tryin' to be a judge, and I think this is her last year. She'll be down here with me.

SM: Where is she going, what school?

SR: At the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. That's where she's in law school now.

SM: And she'll be here in August to participate with you?

SR: Yes. Her and a little girl. And the little girl dances quite a bit, and she'll be dancin' with me out there, and she'll be helpin' Diane with the store, because we need all the help we can get at the time.

SM: Yes, you'll be very busy then, won't you? And it takes a lot of people just to be there and help everyone that comes.

SR: And then I'm hopin' to bring down some, at least ten, I doubt if I can get the top dancers to come down, because this is the time of the
year when they're all out dancin' for money. Just like in the rodeo we travel out for money. Like I go to a place, say . . . O.K., their first prize is $500 or $750. So I'll head for that place tryin' to get that money. But sometimes either you take it, or you either take second, third, or . . . like I said, what we call travellin' money, which is $50 for bein' a good showman.

SM: Even if you don't win something?

SR: Yeah, but even that's good money.

SM: But you are kind of getting accustomed to winning, aren't you?

SR: Yes, I have been winning quite a bit, and it hurts you if you lose, just like in any other athletic competition. It hurts when you lose.

SM: In fact, you have probably put more time and more years into practicing than most athletes, haven't you?

SR: No, that's one thing about Indian dancing. We never practice, because we have a style of our own.

SM: But you start as a very small child, and keep on all your life?

SR: A very small child, yes. But the music gives you the rhythm to go ahead and do what you want to do, and then you do your style of dancin' out there. So we don't go out there and practice, or even with my hoops, I don't practice with my hoops.

SM: But you had to practice, because it takes a lot of skill.

SR: No, I worked with it all my life. See, that is the difference between a white man athlete—we never practice with these—it comes automatically
to us. It just comes naturally to me. Like I was sayin' with my hoop chain—the three hoops—if I bust one hoop, I got two hoops left on me. So then I think real fast, "What am I goin' to do with it?" And I automatically know what to do with it. I can go ahead and do what I have to do with two hoops, and I can still put on a show with two hoops that I could with three hoops. Then I go pick up my other hoop, my single hoop, I use that, and I just go ahead and put on the show with it.

SM: What are these hoops made of?

SR: Willow.

SM: Do you make your own?

SR: Yeah, you have to make your own. I know these people from down to the Arch, O.K., they call themselves "interpreters." You see, when Indians dance with hoops, they supposed to be just enough to fit your body, because it is a prayer, prayer dance. But these interpreters, which I don't like, they got these great big hoops, and these kids can go through them, and can do anything they want with them, jump up and down through it, and that's no hoop dancin'. But they're interpretin' the Indian way of life.

SM: Are they Indian kids?

SR: No, anyone that wants to join in the dance. Of course they don't have no Indian music, so they go around interpretin' Indians. See, . . . Indian dancer back home, he has a hard time, especially on reservation. He has a hard time makin' his costume because it costs money to make these costumes. So they just don't dress that much. But we find . . . very resentful of the people from the East, from New York especially.
They come in there, and they got all the money that they can spend, so they had beautiful costumes.

SM: Do you mean the Indian dancers from New York?

SR: Yes. The white people. They're all white people, and they have beautiful costumes, and they have the money to have the costumes made. They can afford to have it made, and they come in there and they just . . . exactly like Indians because they got blue eyes and blond hair, and they're just exactly like we do.

SM: Do you mean they want to compete in the dances?

SR: No, they're not allowed to compete with us at all. But they want to duplicate us so bad, that they spend thousand dollars on a costume.

SM: And it's very hard for some young fellow on the reservation to do that.

SR: Right. Where an Indian on the reservation cannot afford that.

SM: What is the significance of the Hoop Dance now. You mentioned it briefly. Is it a prayer dance?

SR: Yes. O.K. See, the hoop represents the cycle of life. O.K., we come from Mother Earth, we go back to Mother Earth. It's a complete cycle of life. So the hoop was used to dance with. Now I use three hoops, hoop chain, this is my creation. At the time I had no kids. One was for my father, one was for my mother, one was for myself. And the single hoop that I use, a warm-up hoop, is for my tribe, my people.

SM: Now that means the cycle of life for the tribe, or the cycle of life
for your father, your mother, yourself?

SR: Yeah, the three hoops I have. And the one that I use, the single hoop which is separate, is for my tribe, the Sioux Tribe. And the reason I have this hoop chain is because we're all united—my mother, my father and myself are all united—we come from one, I come from one. So I hook 'em together...

SM: The hoops are hooked together?

SR: Yes, they're hooked together. So that is my own creation, and that is the way I want to pray with it. Now, I fasted before I went to Korea, I fasted when I came back; I fasted before I came up here, and I fasted before Wounded Knee. The longest I ever fasted was two days. And you sit up there without no water, with no food, you sit there and you can pray all alone.

SM: Up in the hills someplace?

SR: Yes, all by yourself. Nobody's around.

SM: Like the vision-seeking of the old days?

SR: Yes, like the old days.

SM: Do people still seek visions?

SR: Oh definitely. Yes. This is our religion, that's why we're doin' it now.

SM: Well, that's interesting because a lot of people think that's something people used to do, but you're still doing it same as always.
SR: We're still doing it. And when I want to pray, I don't go to the churches; I don't like to put on a necktie and a big suit and walk into a church, because the Great Spirit doesn't care how you dress. In fact, we go out there naked as we came into this earth. Into this world we come naked, so that's how we go up there, and we pray with them. O.K., like this one in the Bible that we learned later: "Naked I come, naked I come to you." That's how we are. We're up there--all we have is our pipe when we pray to Him. "Grant me this," but usually when an Indian prays, he doesn't pray for himself, he always prays for somethin' or somebody else.

SM: The other people, the tribe?

SR: Prays for the people, the tribe, for somebody else, because, to us, it's selfish to pray for yourself.

SM: Well, you could pray for help so you could help your people, couldn't you?

SR: Yeah, you can do that too, and you can say, "Give me spirit, give me strength, I can go out and do what I want to for my people." But it always goes to your people and for your lives, for the generations comin' after you, that is what we pray for.

SM: And the Hoop Dance is representative of this same kind of effort?

SR: Yeah, but only it's a different way where I perform this in front of people, you know. O.K., say up here is a park; I'm fastin' all by myself. O.K., the Hoop Dance is another prayer where people see me. O.K., I performed in Sheridan, Wyoming, where there was 8,000 people, and in Gary, Indiana, where I think we had something like 16,000 people in that place. O.K., this is where I perform in front of
them. They don't know what the Hoop Dance is about, but to me these people are watching me do this Hoop Dance, and these hoops mean—I got all colored, they all have my colors on them, they're green, red, yellow, and I dance with them—and to me, although these people don't know nothin' about this religion or anything, all they seein' is I'm kinda like an acrobatic or somethin'.

SM: Like the drama of the spectacle.

SR: Yeah.

SM: What you're thinking of is the prayers, the significance of it.

SR: So I just keep prayin', "Don't let me make a mistake, let me go through it this way," and I have never yet been tangled up in them. I busted a hoop before.

SM: You broke one once?

SR: Yeah. That's bad.

SM: Did you step on them?

SR: No, I pulled it back and the whole thing just busted on me. It didn't bust on me, see the splice came out and it fly open. It didn't break, I've never busted a hoop.

SM: It just broke at the splice, where you put the willow together. Do you splice it with leather or rawhide?

SR: No, I usually use sinew on it, then I tape it with different colors.
SM: Well, they make a colorful addition to the whole spectacle then, don't they?

SR: Yeah, they do.

SM: For the audience, even though the audience rarely realizes how serious you are about it.

SR: Back in '61 or '62, I used to be in my prime, and I danced so fast, really, very fast to fast music. See I use spray paint that glows. Have you ever heard of that?

SM: Yes. Da-glow, they call it.

SR: Yeah. O.K., I spray the bottom part of my feet, and they keep the light on it at certain times. O.K., we got a Fancy War Dance. Turn all the lights off, and the whole thing will glow in it, and I do a real fast war dance. And then the people, they enjoy that. I do real fast spin, and I do a spin so fast that it looks like I'm makin' a complete circle, from the glowing.

SM: You're still going to do the Hoop Dance here in August?

SR: Yes, I will be doing the Hoop Dance, but I am a low slower than I was at that time, but I can still go through it, I'm still capable of doin' it.

SM: That's very interesting, helps to understand.

SR: It's not my people, it's American Indian that I'm tryin' to represent. The whole United States. See ... I don't try to represent just one tribe, not my people. Like most of us, we're really tryin'
to bring the whole United States into what we call just one Indian, because we're all Indians, no matter how we used to fight; no matter how we talk different. We have different cultures, but the object is, we are Indian, we are the American Indian, and this generation, we should stand up as one, the American Indian.

SM: Are the Indian people making progress in this direction?

SR: Oh yes, very much! We are really progressin' on this, to understand each other, helpin' each other. A long time ago, back 20 years ago, if I drove down this road here, and if I seen a Pawnee walkin' down the road, I wouldn't pick him up. But that was 20, 30 years ago. 'Course, I was a kid at that time, but now, if I see an Indian walkin', I don't care what tribe or how he's down, I stop and I pick him up.

SM: So that's improvement, isn't it?

SR: Yes, it is. Quite a bit. And he didn't have no place to go, I turn around and I bring him home; I feed him; say, "Here's a bed to lay on, here's food to eat." That is how we're tryin' to help all American Indians to unite.

SM: Do most of the Indian people feel the same way?

SR: Quite a bit. The younger generation that are growin' up and most in college, they're all planned together to be one, which is the American Indian. See, we're trying to preserve the image of the American Indian.

SM: The culture, religion. . . .

SR: But we cannot do it by fightin' each other. So now we're unitin'
where we can say, "O.K., we're the American Indian." So that is what we're really fightin' for, strivin' for now. O.K., now I have my store here, now I go home and I tell people I have a store; I'm payin' taxes; I am tryin' to set an example where other people can come off the reservation, and live in a place like I'm livin', start their own business and payin' their own taxes, so they will be equal to the white man. Right now . . . I'm still aware of the government. Even though I have my own business here, I'm still aware of the government. I'm tryin' to set an example where they can come out, especially from our reservation. I just say, "Come on out and do it. You can do it, if you set your heart to it, you can do it." I did. I went out. Sure, I got broken bones out of it . . .

SM: The rodeo?

SR: Yes. I was in the hospital, and I been hurt quite a few times, but in the long run, it paid. Now look what I have--I have a store, and it's payin' off, and I can sit back and relax. I don't have to go up there, I can go fishin' if I want to right now. And I don't have to go out there and cut hay and bale hay like I used to, 'cause it paid off, and I'm hopin' to set an example so they can come out and do the same thing.

SM: Now you had a young fellow here last winter, or last fall was it?

SR: No, this February.

SM: And you were helping to bring him here hoping to have him go to school, and so on. Is he going to come back?

SR: Yeah, to college. He's comin' back.
SM: I hope I get a chance to meet him.

SR: I'm sure you will. He's a direct descendant of Red Cloud. Red Cloud is one of the big warriors that fought Custer.

SM: Do you know the name of the son of Red Cloud? There was Red Cloud, his son, and then Charles, and then Oliver.

SR: I have a book on that. I mean, I have a list of names on that because Oliver told me. Well, see, they're Oglalas, and I'm a Brule, but I met them through a mutual relationship, you know, from dancin' and all that, but I know Charley, I know Oliver.

SM: Charley must be an old man now.

SR: Well, there are two Charleys. So the old man, right from the old Red Cloud, his name is Charley, and his son, Charley Red Cloud. So there's two Charleys in that family.

SM: And then this young man you had was one of the Red Clouds?

SR: That's Oliver's son.

SM: That would be a great, great, great, great grandson?

SR: Five generations.

SM: It's hard to keep straight. All Red Clouds, and they've kept the name because they want to preserve it?

SR: No, they'll keep their name because he was a great chief. Now on my reservation, my chief was Spotted Tail. His sister married Crazy Horse.
SM: And then there's a school named after him too now out there in Rosebud, isn't there?

SR: Spotted Tail College. And the place where he got assassinated, I know where it's at 'cause I know the exact spot, but they keep it, you know, fenced off. Highway goes through it, but they don't want people to go down there. They don't want tourists to go on or in sayin', "Oh, this is where he got assassinated, his grave is up there." But they don't want to go up there and see where he was assassinated. Now to us, that seems like you go to a zoo, and you take a picture of a monkey or a picture of an ape, and we don't want that.

SM: Like a sacrilege?

SR: Yeah, because we cherish Spotted Tail so much. O.K., we got his grave up there where people can go see, which is fenced off, but why should they come out and see exactly where he got killed? Now we don't want that. In fact, South Dakota Tourist Association said, "Make a tour down there and charge money to go in there." But we don't want to do that. We don't want to make no money off of a great chief. We don't want to do that. So we just keep it, but I know where it's at, and I haven't even taken Diane down there, because Diane is not an Indian, although she is my wife. . . .

SM: Isn't she part Indian?

SR: She's an Osage, but I cannot take her down there and say . . . well, actually, I didn't have the time.

SM: I suppose you can if you want to, there's nothing wrong with that. It's just that you don't want a bunch of strangers coming by to stand and look at the spot and talk about Spotted Tail, and so on. Generally thinking of the Indian situation throughout the United
States, there is some progress being made?

SR: Oh definitely. There is very much comin' up now.

SM: It's been a long, dry spell, hasn't it?

SR: Since Wounded Knee, since '73, things have progressed so much that we are recognized now. O.K., even President Ford is afraid that somethin' might happen again. So the American Indian Movement—O.K., I'm not with it any more because right now all we have in there is just a bunch of young bucks, 17, some are runaways and are 14, some are younger than that, and they're runaways from different homes, and they are the ones that are creatin' lot of problems, and they are hurtin' the Indian image. So we're tryin' to start organization where we can go and stop these people before they do it, the young ones.

SM: Before they cause too much adverse reaction?

SR: Yes, against us. Because at Wounded Knee . . . O.K., we came up, people know that there are Indians alive; they're armed, and we can fight back. But these people, the young generation are comin' out where they're destroyin' the image of the Indian by doin' unnecessary thing, like, say in Waggoner. That was totally uncalled for.

SM: Which one was that?

SR: In Waggoner, South Dakota, oh, about two months ago. Just because one Indian got fired . . . and they did not investigate, did not call AIM, like Russell Means, to come in and find out. In fact, they went out and said, "O.K., we're AIM." So seven of them went over there with rifles and they tried to take the place over, and that was uncalled for.
SM: Without even checking out the details why he'd been fired?

SR: Right. And it came out that he was always late for work, he wasn't puttin' out. He has to work, just like anybody else. Just because he's an Indian doesn't mean that he's gonna lay around and get away with it. So the bosses told him, "You're fired." And he went out; he got mad; he got his buddies--they all had long hair--and they claimed they was AIM, which I doubt they was, and they went in there and they stormed it; they ran everybody out of there and they had a gun battle there for two days.

SM: What kind of plant was it?

SR: A cheese plant.

SM: They had one in New Mexico up at Shiprock too, the Fairchild plant, where they laid off some women workers and then the movement closed that one.

SR: O.K., that was called for.

SM: The force had been cut down from about 1,000 to around 500 or so.

SR: Well, see, if they're tax-exempt when they're put on the reservation.

SM: Now this was a Navajo-owned plant.

SR: Yeah. O.K., now they're supposed to hire 70% Indian. What happened was they laid off all the Indians and they kept the white people on there, so that is a good excuse to. . . .

SM: Has that one been settled yet?
SR: Yeah, it's been settled, it's back in operation.

SM: Peter McDonald, the Navajo Tribal Chairman, was out there?

SR: I just got a letter—even though I'm an ex-member of the AIM, I still get letters tellin' me there might be a trouble spot here, there might be somethin' here, but lot of it is settled before it ever starts. Quite a bit of it is settled before it starts. Like this one in Wisconsin, Menominees, now that was uncalled for too.

SM: The one at the monastery at Gresham?

SR: Yeah. If they went up there, asked for it, they would have gave it to them. But they didn't do it. They just went up there and stormed it and took it, so they gave it to them.

SM: They gave it to the tribe?

SR: Yeah, they gave it to the Menominees, so they got it now. So what are they gonna do with it? They gotta figure out, "If we do get this place, how are we gonna operate it, who are we gonna keep here, where we get the food from?" Now these things they did not think about before they stormed the place.

SM: You've been awfully busy lately, and it's going to get busier as the summer wears on, isn't it?

SR: Yeah, like I'll be gone Friday, Saturday and Sunday I'll be back and I'll be goin' again. By Wednesday I'll be goin' home, and I'll probably be back here the 8th of July, and I'll be here until the 17th, and I'll be takin' off for Danville, Illinois, for another powwow down there.
SM: You'll be doing a lot of travelling.

SR: After the Sun Dance, yeah. I do have quite a bit of travellin'. But I'll be goin' back for the regular powwow. When I get back, I'll head for Chicago powwow.

SM: You kind of enjoy it, though, don't you? You like to do the dancing?

SR: Oh yes, I love to do the dancin'.

SM: It's part of your nature now, and you're a champion both of the United States and Canada. Can you take Diane with you most of the time?

SR: Well, I had planned on it, but since we got the baby . . . I thought if I take her to different climates . . .

SM: You wouldn't want her to be exposed to different climates? Well, you've got everything going well now for you, haven't you?

SR: Oh yes, very good. I am workin' with the Indian people, but I am not workin' with the American Indian Movement any more, because I'm against bloodshed. After '73, I believe, actually, personally, believe, in my heart, that we can get things done without bloodshed.

SM: I think so, I hope so anyway.

SR: And that is what I'm against--bloodshed. I hate to take position against the government with rifles, and, to tell the truth, I'm afraid of rifles right now. I just got caught with one up in Pine Ridge, because I had to go up there, I had to pick up some supplies for the store. I got shot at, my Gremlin, if you noticed the back window was blown out, and my aerial was blown off.
SM: Do you mean on the reservation?

SR: Yeah, by the half breeds up there, the ones that were with . . . they call them "goons" . . . that were with Dick Wilson. But before I went up there, my brother, he lent me this sawed-off shotgun, and I shot back at 'em, because I had to do somethin' instead of gettin' wiped out there. But they didn't call me to court—they reported me so I got arrested there at Pine Ridge. They took my shotgun away, and there was nobody to press charges against me, so they fined me $5.00.

SM: And let you go?

SR: They took my shotgun though.

SM: That's what Diane was teasing you about when she said, "Whenever I hear a siren I get nervous."

SR: Well, that was an unfortunate incident.

SM: Well, these other fellows, they should be working for the same thing you are, shouldn't they?

SR: No, these people aren't working—they're livin' off their parents, mostly off their parents, and all they do is drink all day. Well, up there, they're always drunk. If they wasn't drunk, then it wouldn't have happened.

SM: Well, you were lucky then that they didn't hit you. They knocked the whole back window out of your car?

SR: Oh yeah, the whole back window is knocked out. The window is shot out, and they shot the aerial off.
SM: You must have been a little nervous about then?

SR: I was down in a ditch. Well, I come out of it. You see, my dad's a judge in Rosebud Agency, so when they picked me up I had one phone call, so I called him up, told him I was in jail, told him what happened. So that night he called the judge there, and he said, "What is this, what's going on. Explain to me why these people can go around shooting people?" So he said, "If they come in, I'll make sure that they're prosecuted." But nobody come in that night, and Pine Ridge jail is the most dirtiest jail that you can ever think of. They lock me in this place...

SM: In the village of Pine Ridge?

SR: Yes. Right in the tribal building. The Rosebud jail has plastic-covered mattresses where they're clean, and they have these people that are trustees, they wash 'em every day, and it's clean; it's mopped, and they make sure everybody takes a bath. Pine Ridge--no. You don't have none of this, and it's filthy. They feed you in rusty rin cups, beer cans, that's what they use to give you coffee in. Next morning, I said, "Uh uh, I'm not goin' to drink this." I just give it away, and this guy was in there for 30 days. They had him on a charge of bootleggin' and they couldn't prove it. He plead not guilty and they had no proof on him, but they kept him--two charges that ran up to, say like $180.00 bond, and he couldn't afford to put the bond so they keepin' him in jail 'til he goes to court. Which is somethin' like three months from the time I was there.

SM: And they were waiting to arrest these people who shot at you if they had come by to prefer charges. Well, at least that makes you feel better, doesn't it?

SR: Sure did.
SM: And you speak optimistically about the Indian movement generally, so that's kind of a happy note to end our interview on. I'm grateful for your conversation.